

CASINO VS HISTORICAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS ALONG ROUTE NO.9 SAVANNAKHET CITY

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This research project aims to study the significance of the historical tourism destinations databank of Route No.9 (East West Economic Corridor), located in Savannakhet, Savannakhet Province, Lao P.D.R. The historical destinations were assessed by adapting the Thailand Tourism Standard for measuring values. The author found that the measuring system should be adapted to the context of significance and values, as the numeric scheme was not the last result. The Lao Government has been trying to develop an ecotourism and cultural tourism policy. In order to reach quantitative growth, gambling businesses have been established in Savannakhet on Route No.9 which is also full of cultural tourism destinations. Nongdeune Temple VS Savan Vegas is a case study for historical tourism destination problems, that maybe contrasted with those of the Lao Government which is considering policy for tourism planning.

Keywords: Casino, Historical Tourism, Route No.9, Savannakhet

JEL Classification: L83, M1, O1

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to study the importance of Route No.9, the main commercial route of Lao P.D.R. with Thailand, which has implications on the long-standing relationship of historical and cultural tourism destinations.

At the present, the Laos National Tourism Administration has developed a tourism marketing policy to be competitive with its neighbors, by promoting ecotourism and cultural tourism. At the beginning phase, www.logisticnews.net (2007) gave the idea that Route No.9, which links to Thailand, Lao PDR. and Vietnam, including logistics in the Indochina market, would be a benefit to tourism. The most popular segment of this is Route No. 9 (East West Economic Corridor) from



Mukdahan, Thailand to the Central regions of Vietnam such as Hue and Hoi An.

The article aims to consolidate the historical and cultural tourism destinations along route No. 9, to support the growth of sustainable tourism. Thailand does not have a competitive pricing strategy for agricultural products with Vietnam and China. Therefore, Thailand could improve efforts to enhance tourism capacity. Each province has a different identity. (Thailand Research Fund, 2005) The capacity to oversee historical and cultural tourism destinations in Mukdahan and Savannakhet has moderate potential (assessed by author), but a lack of research methodology. Many temples along the Mekong River, and Savannakhet City, Savannakhet lack a perception of value, only because those temples are not on the top destinations list.

The Thailand Research Fund (2005) discussed the image of Thailand's boundaries with Myanmar, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, South China, and Vietnam that has a negative image such as illicit trade and human labour. The article's support of a solution to the boundary problems by enhancing facilities management, finding new attractions, and promoting Thailand as the center of tourism is a "win-win strategy". Sustainable tourism needs strong participation from neighborhood exchange and sharing of tourism knowledge and experiences in tourism destination development, including transportation. The different lessons learned from each country could be consolidated to create one Asian destination.

The economic aspect, Telecomjournal (2001) proposed that Route No.9 will generate much money from commercial trade. The connection of economic and folk life by this route is an important linkage to facilitate the infrastructure. There is a new transportation route plan to get much money from commercial investments, the linkage of local economics and the community. Route no.9 is the commercial gateway to local life. It is the key to new globalization of the greater Mekong sub-region of the six countries: Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, and China.

Since 1992, the East West Economic Corridor Project has tried to link Malamang – Meowadee (Myanmar) – Mae Sod – Mukdahan (Thailand) – Savannakhet (Laos) – Dongha – Danang (Vietnam) by connecting route no.9 to a communication network.

The East West Economic Corridor Project was started when the Asian Development Bank (ADB) proposed a framework and strategy to enhance participation to clearly develop the economic activities by focusing on economic structure and commercial regulations to develop the East West Economic Corridor.

Mr.Phetsamone Veerapan, Director of Planning and International Relationships, Ministry of Transportation, Country Post, said that this route from the Seno, Savannakhet province, Laos-Bao Boundary, about 240 kilometers, was supported by a fund from JICA (Japan) about 40 Million US Dollars.

Table 1 The Assessment Outcome of Tourism Destinations in Savannakhet City, Savannakhet Province, Lao P.D.R.

| Historical Tourism Destination | Components | | | Total points | Standard level |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|
| | Attracting capacity | Carrying capacity | Tourism management | | |
| Wat Bann Na Toey | 24.5 | 4 | 7 | 35.5 | Low |
| Wat Bann Nong Doen | 31 | 6 | 10 | 47.0 | Low |
| Wat Pone Sawang | 35.5 | 6 | 11 | 52.5 | Low |
| Phra That Ing Hung* | 43.5 | 10 | 25 | 78.5 | Excellent |
| Wat Rattana Rangsri | 31.5 | 6 | 12 | 49.5 | Low |
| Wat Sunantaram | 29.5 | 6 | 11 | 46.5 | Low |
| Wat Jom Kaew | 29 | 6 | 10 | 45.0 | Low |
| Wat Saiyabhum | 35 | 7 | 23 | 65.0 | Good |
| Old Chinese Shrine | 24.5 | 5 | 16 | 45.5 | Low |
| Wat Vietnam | 29.5 | 4 | 14.5 | 48.0 | Low |
| Saint Theresa Church* | 42 | 9 | 27.5 | 78.5 | Excellent |

The second Mekong Bridge is Mukdahan – Savannakhet, an important East – West land transportation way to link route no. 9 in Laos to Dongha city – Danang, Vietnam, which Thailand and Laos possess together. This bridge is 1.5 kilometers in length, and has only two 2 lanes, for cars.

Accordingly, the researcher endeavored to consolidate the cultural sites along route no.9, because cultural tourism is not just a set of commercial transactions, but the ideological framing of history and identity. (Nuala C. Johnson, 1999) In relation to the economic consequences of this growth (Breathnach, 1994), there are cultural and political implications of transforming the significance of cultural sites from sacred places to quantitative tourism destinations. The table below (See table 1) shows the Tourism Standard which the researcher utilized as a research tool. Some of the topics in the historical tourism destinations assessment form should be adapted to be qualitative as the numbers could not evaluate the significance of the sites.

The sites that were excellent in the standard level, were on the tourist attractions' list and are marked. They are listed on the tourist destinations' map, which does not have any management recommended. But the others that lack management are not on the tourism authority's tourism attraction lists.

Tourism is one of many activities in a community or region that requires planning and coordination. Planning is the process of identifying objectives and defining and evaluating quantitative and qualitative methods of achieving them. Therefore, further research by comprehensive planning, i.e. planning which considers all of the tourism resources, organizations, markets, and programs within a region, is necessary. Comprehensive planning also considers economic, environmental, social, and institutional aspects of tourism development. (Adapted from Daniel J. Stynes and Cynthia O'Halloran, 1987)

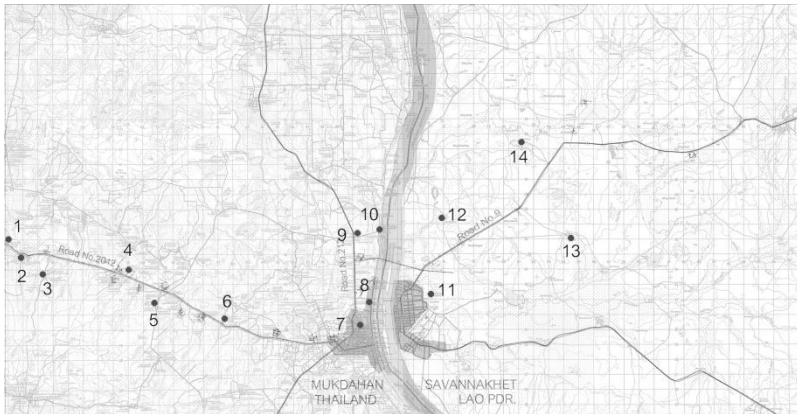
THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Savannakhet City, Savannakhet Province, Lao P.D.R.

Muang District, Mukdahan Province, Thailand has founded significance religious buildings for example, Wat Amphawan, Wat Sra Bua, Wat Thomanas Vihara, Wat Aranyawasri, Wat Sri Chantravas, Wat Gud-Ngong Noi, Wat Arunrangsri Moleewanawas, Wat Pho Sri Kaew, Wat Sri Sa-ard, and Wat Pho Sai.

In Savannakhet City, Savannakhet Province, Lao P.D.R., some architecture could not be assigned an analysis significance and some could, e.g. Wat Sawang Thammaram, Wat Bann Nong Doen, Wat Phra That Ing Hung, and Wat Bann Na Toey. Particularly, Wat Bann Nong Doen, which is located nearer the area of Savan Vegas.

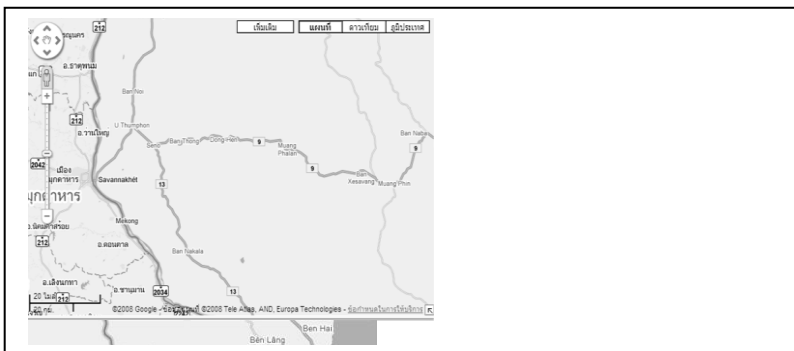
Figure 1 Aerial photo showing temples along route no.9



THE INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS' POLICY

Asian Development Bank –ADB

The action plan for an economic special zone, by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), was proposed in Savannakhet province as a pilot case. (Asian Development Bank, 2004).



Map 13 Route No. 9 Mukdahan – Savannakhet – Dong Ha
Source: Google Maps, Mukdahan. [Http://maps.google.com/](http://maps.google.com/). Accessed 5
th of December 2008, at 15.35.

The heavy concentration of tourist attractions within fairly short distances, such as those in Hue and Da Nang in Viet Nam as well as in Mawlamyine in Myanmar, allows an integrated approach to developing these clustered sites. These tourism sites are linked to route no. 9 in Savannakhet.

Greater Mekong Sub Region (GMS)

An example of a GMS project that was supported by the ADB is the existing domestic airport in Savannakhet, Lao P.D.R. in the EWEC which has been upgraded from its state of two years ago. A proposal was made to share the use of the Savannakhet airport with Thailand, in particular, residents of Mukdahan and nearby areas given the expected completion of the access road and the Second Mekong International Bridge, as well as the cross-border facilitation measures that will be put in place. This proposal was discussed in detail at the Workshop, and a broad action plan was formulated. (Asian Development Bank, 2004)

Ayeyawady - Chao Phraya - Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy: ACMECS

The formulation of an arrangement between and among the governments of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Union of Myanmar, the Kingdom of Thailand and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam on the Admittance of Tourism Vehicles, is mentioned in the plan.

Both the GMS and ACMECS are related in the international policies, but for the national tourism plan Lao has revealed only the natural sites. (See more at <http://www.ecotourismlaos.com/ecotourismprojects.htm>)

SOCIALIST AND ECONOMIC

Wikipedia (2008) states that Laos is one of five of the current socialist countries. The politics of Laos takes place in a framework of a single-party socialist republic. The only legal political party is the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). The head of state is President Choummaly Sayasone, who also is Secretary-General (leader) of the LPRP. The economics of transition in Laos seeks to depict and analyze the transition process that the Lao economy has been undertaking since the mid-1980s. (Bourdet, 2000) Before the adoption of the "New Thinking" economic reform policy, the country's local trade was

centralized. Decisions on manufacturing, wage rates and production structure were made entirely by the government.

www.business-in-Asia.com (2007) analyzed the Laos economy stating that Laos has a law on the promotion of local investments. This focuses on the promotion of local investments directly. A unit responsible for providing all Laotian investors with legal guidance was established. Soft loans, of which the interest rate is determined by the Bank of the Lao PDR, have also been provided for investment activities. In addition, tax exemption privileges have been granted to local investors for all investments made in underdeveloped areas.

Nongdeune Temple VS Savan Vegas

“Laos will open its first casino complex along the Thai-Lao border opposite Mukdahan province in November. Construction of the Savan Vegas Casino-Cum-Entertainment Complex in Nongdeune village in Laos' Savannakhet province is now 80% complete. The project includes a casino, a five-star hotel with 160 rooms, restaurants, an amusement park, an aqua-park and a traditional spa service centre.” (Wallapa Triprapakorn, Bangkok Post, 2008)

Figure 2 Savan Vegas



Source: *Savan Vegas and Casino. Savan Vegas.*

Http://savancasino.adisorn.org/index.htm. Accessed 3rd December 2008, at 16.10.

Nongdeune Temple located in Nongdeune village, Kaisonophomvihan District, Savannakhet Province, Laos. This temple (Wat) contains items of historical, social, aesthetic and scientific value.

For historical value, this is the central temple of the village. The center of making merit in the village has the social value. The aesthetic atmosphere around the temple is full of local rice farms. There is a local ordination hall (Sim), where the process of construction is very traditional, and valuable for collection of construction methods of older generations.

Back to the gambling business, it is a mode of entertainment that makes use of money as a tool for betting. Though it provides fun and excitement, excessive gambling may become risky, more so if the money being utilized already involves money you can't spare. This holds true if the gambling form involved is casino gambling. Nevertheless, gambling in a casino offers good and bad effects on a player. (www.casinosonnet.com, 2009)

A liberal foreign investment law was passed in June 1994, which allows 100% foreign ownership of business ventures. Consequently, the gambling of Savan Vegas is officially authorized by the Lao government.

The political concept of socialism has changed from the past. The impact of attracting tourists to come to Savan Vegas is one of the examples that could reflect the relationship between the tourism, gambling business and the cultural way of life. However, some countries (NowPublic, 2008) are adopting measures to limit casinos due to social unrest caused by increased crime rates, high inflation, and rampant corruption. The casinos may very well increase the GDP of tourism but at what cost to its delicate social fabric?

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